

## Extract from my autobiography “To Remember is to Live” The Life and Times of Raymond E Fisher

### The War Years 1939 —1945

During the summer of 1939 there was a fear of gas attacks when war commenced and the government advised everyone in the country that they would be issued with a gas mask. Families were notified through the local papers of the centres around the city where the masks would be issued and also when they were to attend their centre for fitting. Our local centre was St. Barnabas Church hall and we duly set out on the appropriate evening to collect our gas masks. When we arrived chairs were set out, in similar fashion to musical chairs, behind tables containing all the different size gas masks. Having sat down, the ARP (Air Raid Precaution) Wardens came along and tried out the various masks until they found your correct size; it was then put in a cardboard box and given to you.

Because I was over 5 years old I had to have the standard black rubber adult style mask and I can remember being jealous of the younger children as they were fitted with a ‘Mickey Mouse’ mask which was red in colour. It was called Mickey Mouse because they had separate goggle style eyepieces and a small flap of rubber over the nose area, which flapped when breathing out. Those families with babies were given a special “baby mask” that was like a large rubber hood with a full size window on one side and a skirt made of some kind of material. The baby was placed inside the hood and the skirt was tied around its tummy to seal it. There was a hand pump on the side, which had to be continually pushed in and out like an accordion so that air was available to the baby.



Baby's Gas Mask



Up to 5 year Old-Gas Mask

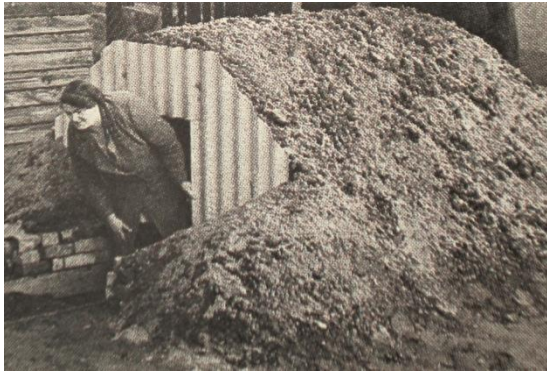


All over 5 years old Gas Mask

Everyone had to carry their gas masks at all times for a period after war commenced and when we arrived at school our masks had to be left on the pegs in the corridor with our outdoor clothes. Because the boxes holding the masks were made of cardboard it was not the ideal material when it was raining so my mother made me a waterproof cover from a material called “American” cloth. Once again the “status” thing reared its ugly head and to be “cool”, as it is known today, you aspired to have a metal container for your mask. These could be bought in the shops but I have no idea where they got the metal from to make them. I eventually persuaded my parents to get me one, and to this day I remember that it was yellow and of tubular construction with a cord attached so that you could sling it over your shoulder. Sometime after the masks were issued we had to go back and have an extra filter attached, presumably so that it would cope with additional types of gas. I cannot remember when we were told that it was no longer necessary to carry our gas masks at all times, this occurred probably during 1940 or early in 1941.

Those households, with sufficient garden space, were issued with an “Anderson” shelter, which was named after Sir John Anderson who was chief of the ARP. The shelter was made of extra strong corrugated iron and the first issue consisted of 3 back sheets, and four 6ft sections with a curved top for the sides. The front consisted of 4 sheets, which, when fitted together, left a hole approximately 3 feet by 2 feet so that a door could be inserted. A suitable area of the garden was marked out so that a hole, approximately 6-foot square and 3 to 3½ feet deep, could be excavated. The shelter was then erected inside this hole, with the corrugated sheets being bolted to lengths of angle iron making the unit extremely rigid. This allowed the shelter to be half in and half out of the ground. The soil, which had been dug out, was then placed over the top so that the whole shelter had some protection from nearby bomb blasts. Many

people added their own corrugated iron “porch” to cover the opening in the front to give them more protection from this angle. Sometime after the first shelters had been issued, two additional curved sheets were given to householders so that the shelter could be extended to take a couple of issue bunk type beds, which fitted onto the angle iron frame. Those people, who could not install an Anderson, had the option of having a “Morrison” Shelter. This was erected inside the house in one of the downstairs rooms. It was about the size of a double bed and consisted of a sprung frame at the bottom on which a bed mattress could be placed. On each corner was a hefty 6ins angle iron post about 3 feet 6 inches high and to top it all off was a ½ inch thick steel sheet. Fitting the sides with a thick wire frame completed the box so formed. In the event of an air raid, the occupants would get into this space and if the house was demolished then they stood a good chance of survival.



Typical Anderson Shelter



Typical Morrison Shelter

Brick and reinforced concrete air raid shelters were also built above ground in many streets and on open spaces in front of public houses. The inside of these shelters were divided into small “rooms” with wooden slatted seats along each wall and were mainly for the use of those local households who did not have any other type of shelter or who preferred to sit out the air raids with their neighbours. Underground air raid shelters were also constructed in Chapplefield Gardens in the centre of Norwich. These Shelters were built under the grass areas bordering the pathways around the edge of the park and were for the use of the public and families who lived in the area. They were built approximately 4 feet under the surface and constructed of precast concrete forming a 7-foot square tunnel similar to those built for some of the city schools. As the market traders had to clear their stalls from the market each weekend, there was an area under the Memorial Gardens in front of City Hall for storage. This storage space was strengthened, on the outbreak of war, by the insertion of large wooden beams and supports to form an air raid shelter for members of the public who might be in the city when a raid occurred. From that day onwards the stalls were not dismantled at weekends and the removable stalls were gradually replaced by the permanent ones of today and of course the Sunday morning “orators” lost their pitches and they too disappeared.



Typical Surface Shelter

When the war began on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939 a strict blackout had already been introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> September and everyone had to ensure that they complied with this and that their windows and doors were lightproof. Patrolling ARP wardens monitored the blackout precautions and anyone violating the rules could have faced up to 2 years in jail or a £500 fine. For the most part those who were caught were fined around £2. My father or grandfather made

wooden framed shutters, covered with a suitable black and lightproof material, for all our windows so that we would not show any light. These were put up each night on every window in the house before the lights were turned on. The outside doors had a large thick heavy curtain on them so that light could not escape from the cracks around the door. Most of the houses, ours included, also had lots of paper tape in the form of a cross on all the window panes to minimize the risk of splinters should a bomb explode nearby.

At the commencement of hostilities, all cinemas, theatres and football grounds were obliged to close as a precaution against mass casualties in the event of an air raid. Fortunately this closure only lasted for two weeks and all venues were allowed to reopen, much to the relief of the population. Although some places of entertainment in Norwich did suffer damage from the bombing, to the best of my knowledge this did not happen during performances and no member of an audience was injured. If there was an air raid during a performance, a notice would be flashed up on the screen and people could leave if they so desired. The majority of people remained in the cinema, although several would leave when the red alert (3 minute warning) was flashed onto the screen. One Saturday afternoon during 1943, my uncle took my cousins Donny, Ted and myself to see "One of our Aircraft is Missing" at the Odeon (now the car park for Anglia Square) in Boltolph Street. Shortly after the film had started the alert notice flashed up on the screen and we left the cinema and returned to Shotesham. When we arrived back home we were told that one of our aircraft had crashed into the Chain Home Radar pylons at Poringland. This was a coincidence because the film we had gone to see began with an aircraft crashing into an electricity pylon. It was nearly 40 years later before I actually saw the black and white film when it was shown on television!

Buses had all their inside lights removed and dim blue lights were fitted. Some buses (mostly single decker) were converted to run on, I believe, coal gas. To hold this gas there was a large "bag" fitted to the roof and some buses towed a small trailer, which I believe, actually produced the gas. So that more people could be carried, all the seats on the single decker buses were changed from front facing to side facing. This allowed probably another 20 or 30 people to stand down the centre of the bus thereby saving fuel.

Getting about in the streets in the blackout was a nightmare as it was so dark that it was difficult to see and if you used a torch it had to be masked so that only a small pencil beam was visible. Most of the street lampposts were painted white from the ground up to about 4 feet in an effort to stop people bumping into them. The tops of all the red post boxes were painted with a green solution, which was supposed to change colour if there was a gas attack. Whether this would have worked I do not know, as we were never put in the position of finding out. Before the war all the terrace houses had iron railings and a gate enclosing the front garden. These were all removed by the local authorities and melted down for the war effort and never replaced.

All private cars were laid up during the war unless your work was considered to be of national importance and you had a permit, issued by the government, to keep it on the road. As petrol was rationed it could only be obtained from certain garages and coupons were necessary for each gallon of petrol issued. The total amount of petrol that was allowed each month depended on the type of vehicle and the nature of the work that the owner was doing. All lights on the vehicles had to be masked and reflectors had to be painted white so that glare was at a minimum, in fact it must have been impossible to see much at all as the headlights only emitted two thin pencil like beams, but then speed was not the main consideration.

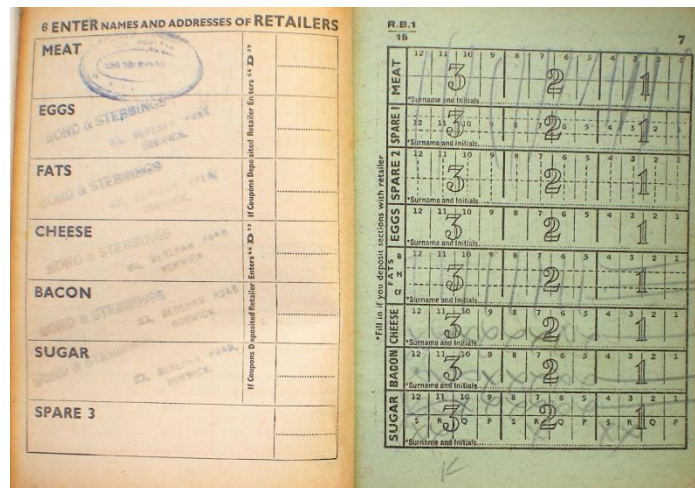
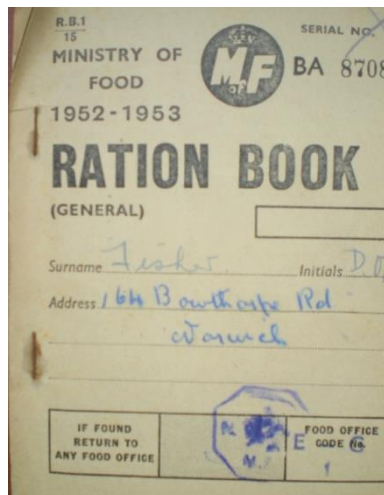
My uncle, Herbert Eastoe, had a permit to drive his Austin 7 Saloon during the war, as he was Clerk of Works at RAF Marham. His job necessitated remaining at Marham during the week but he was able to travel home to Norwich at weekends. Because he had this privilege, he took my aunt and cousin plus myself and my mother over to Castle Rising one weekend to see my aunt Vera and uncle Archie. On the Saturday afternoon he squeezed all of us in this little car and headed down the hill to Kings Lynn. At the bottom of Knights Hill in South Wootton, the police and the army stopped us at a checkpoint as Kings Lynn was a prohibited area and you were only allowed in if you lived there. To our surprise after my uncle had shown his ID and permit to drive, they allowed us to proceed and we were able to spend the afternoon in Kings Lynn. So much for security.

Every person was issued with a ration book in October 1939 but rationing did not come into force until January 8<sup>th</sup> 1940. Rationing covered Meat, Butter, Sugar, Bacon, Cooking Fat, Rice, Condensed Milk, Cheese, Eggs, Cereals, Biscuits and sweets. You also had coupons for soap and soap products. The average weekly ration for an adult was 8ozs (226g)



Sugar, 4ozs (113g) Bacon, 1 egg, 4ozs Margarine, 2ozs (56g) Butter, 4ozs Lard, 4ozs Cheese and meat to the value of 1s.10d (9p), you were also entitled to one pack of dried egg per month.

The meat ration, which was about 1lb (453grms) in weight, consisted of fresh meat but you also had to take some 'corned beef' as well. The ration books contained coupons for all these commodities, and they were either cut out or crossed through with an indelible pencil (no biro's in those days) when an item was purchased, to ensure that the item was only issued once. To obtain these rations it was also necessary to register with a grocer and a butcher, as you were unable to purchase any rationed item from any other retailer. We only used to eat butter before the war but when rationing came on the scene it was a case of eating margarine or going without. Every Friday, when my mother brought the groceries home she would mix the weeks' butter and margarine ration together to make it more palatable.



Ministry of Food Ration Book

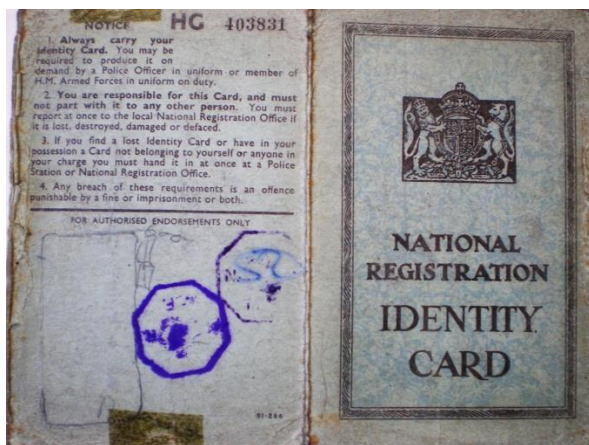
In 1940 there was no such thing as tea bags and tea was usually purchased in its loose form or if it was branded, then it was sometimes sold in 4ozs packets. It was a blow to the good old British cuppa when in July 1940, tea was rationed to 2ozs (56g) per person per week. Oranges and bananas were unobtainable and they disappeared from the greengrocers until after the war. It was possible to buy biscuits, which in texture were similar to Cream Crackers or Water biscuits and which were much larger being about six inches in diameter and a quarter of an inch thick. These were known as Ships biscuits and even though they were extremely hard I enjoyed eating them spread with some of my butter ration, I doubt very much if you would have been able to eat them if you had false teeth.

My uncle Jack, who lived at Shotesham, was in business as a Coal Merchant and Market Gardener and supplied many of the stalls on Norwich Market, as well as greengrocery shops around the city with vegetables in season. This was fortunate for us as we always had a supply of fresh vegetables and as they also kept chickens, we were able to supplement our 1 egg per week ration with some fresh eggs from them. This was strictly illegal, as, apart from a small quantity that they were allowed to keep for themselves, all eggs had to be sold to the Egg Marketing board. In fact my mother used to get a couple of dozen eggs once or twice a year which she would place in a large bucket and cover with a liquid called "ISN Glass" to preserve them. These could then be used for cooking over a period of months, which allowed mother to make cakes in the normal way with eggs, rather than having to use powered egg. My relations also kept rabbits and we often had one of these to supplement the meat ration. So in many ways we were much better off than a lot of families when rationing commenced.

Clothes and shoes were not really rationed, but in order to purchase them you had to be able to hand over the appropriate number of coupons to obtain the item you required. When it is realised that you needed coupons for just about everything you were wearing you can understand that the annual allocation of 60 coupons for each person did not go very far. This number was reduced in May 1942 to 48 per person. A suit for instance, might require more coupons than you had, so it was necessary to save, or in other words not buy other clothes, until you had enough to purchase the garment you wanted. If this was not possible then you had to wait for the next batch of coupons in your ration book to be activated for use. As an example, a coat or jacket for a man required 13 coupons and a pair of trousers needed 8 with a further 7 for a pair of shoes. A ladies dress would require 11 coupons; a blouse 5 and a pair

of shoes were also 5. The total number of coupons required for a boy's jacket, trousers and shoes would have been 12 and a girl's dress, blouse and shoes would require 14. Presumably it was considered that children's clothes did not require so much material as the adult version. I found an entry in an old (1941) diary of my mothers' where she noted that she had bought me a suit, consisting of jacket, waistcoat and short trousers, for the sum of £2-1s-0d (£2.05p) and a cap for 3s 6d (17½p) which used up 14 of my precious clothing coupons. My father was lucky in one respect as he had small feet and was able to wear the largest size children's shoes. As these required fewer coupons, he was able to save some of his clothing coupons for other things. Furniture was not rationed but there were only certain shapes and sizes available and they were given the name "utility"

Every person was issued with an Identity Card. This contained your name and address and also your identity number. Our family number was TPAQ / 108/ and each member then had a final number in the sequence, 1 (for the head of the household – namely the man) 2 for the spouse and 3 for the first child. My father's number was TPAQ/108/1, my mother's was TPAQ/108/2 and mine was TPAQ/108/3.



National Identity Card

On the first night of the war I can only assume that the adults went to bed wondering what it would all mean to them. They did not have long to wait as on that very first night the siren sounded at around midnight. I can still remember my father coming through to my bedroom holding a candle and saying that I had to get up and get dressed. This I did and we all went downstairs. My mother and I then sat in the food cupboard under the stairs waiting for something to happen but fortunately nothing did and the all clear sounded about a half an hour later. This was one of the many false alarms that sounded in the early (phoney) days of the war. Many families brought their beds downstairs and eventually, because nothing happened, people would not get up at night when the siren sounded. While we were still living in Orchard Street my grandfather, who was a carpenter, made a couple of camp beds for us to use downstairs. One was a single, which my father slept on in the living room, and the other was a double, which fitted in the recess next to the chimney breast in the front room, where I used to sleep with my mother.

I was still a member of Wensum View junior school when World War II commenced at the start of the September term in 1939. We attended School on the first day of the new term and were told that for the next six months we would only be able to attend school for one hour per day. This was necessary because there were no Air Raid Shelters for the children to use should there be a raid during school hours. During this six-month period large holes were dug in the school playing field and a series of underground shelters were constructed. Each one consisted of a 7 foot square tunnel about 50 feet long, made of pre-cast concrete sections with entrance steps at either end and slatted wooden seats running along each side. They were only a few feet below the surface and would only have been of use to protect against any debris flying about. After they had been completed we commenced normal school again and as far as I can recollect we only used them a couple of times before the Norwich blitz in 1942. Once inside the teachers would close the heavy wooden doors over the entrance. All shelters were fitted with electric lighting so that when we did go down we could continue with our lessons. One of the first Air Raids on Norwich occurred at around 4 o'clock in the afternoon without any warning and I remember some bombs exploding and we were told to get under our desks. I believe the bombs were dropped on Carrow Works, which was across the city from us so we came to no harm. As far as I can remember we were not in the least bit frightened and thought of it as an exciting experience after which the lesson continued as normal.



Entrance to school air raid shelter

The war did not alter the way we, as children, carried on with our daily lives. We would still play “Cowboys and Indians” and we continued to roam around the local area and never thought about the possibility of an air raid occurring. During those early days, the odd German aircraft would occasionally appear over the city in daylight without any warning being given. These sneak raids as they were known usually occurred on overcast days when there was plenty of low cloud about. They would suddenly appear out of cloud cover, apparently looking for the Boulton and Paul works on Riverside Road or the railway sidings at either City or Thorpe stations. A couple of bombs would be dropped and a few streets machine gunned before the aircraft disappeared back into cloud the complete episode lasting no more than 10 – 15 minutes. Presumably our parents were more aware of what was actually happening and therefore were inclined to worry about the consequences of these intrusions whereas we children accepted it as a little excitement.

Because of its flat contours and proximity to the continent, Norfolk and Suffolk provided the ideal location to construct the airfields, which would be needed for the war effort. In fact by the end of hostilities, there were some 29 airfields in the county of Norfolk alone. This eventually led to the new hobby among boys, myself included, of “plane spotting”. To assist with this hobby, there were several spotters’ books and magazines on the market containing silhouette views of all the current RAF and German aircraft with brief details of each. Once America came into the war in 1942 a large number of local airfields became home to the planes of the USAAF 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, which made for a spotters paradise. In fact there were so many US personnel in Norfolk it became known as “Little America”. By the time the war ended we were able to identify, on sight, most of the current aircraft in service. It was also possible to identify the majority of allied aircraft by the sound of their engines alone. To this day I can still identify the Spitfire, Hurricane and Lancaster by their engine noise well before they come into view.

My parents decided to move house in 1941, but I have no idea whether this was so that I would be closer to school, or whether they felt that they would like to live in a larger house. On Thursday the 20<sup>th</sup> February I was told, before leaving for school that we would be moving to our new house at 34 Helena Road. I am sure my parents did not have a very easy move as it was snowing all day, but by the time I arrived home in the afternoon all seemed calm as we settled in. This house was much larger than the previous one, with 3 large bedrooms upstairs, a front room, living room, a much larger kitchen and a small scullery. The third bedroom was about 8 foot wide and quite long as it was built over the top of the kitchen, scullery, coalhouse and lavatory. There was still no bathroom and the lavatory was outside, but we did have a purpose built outside coalhouse between the scullery wall and the lavatory. The kitchen had more space because the gas cooker, built in copper, and sink were all in the little scullery. My uncle’s house, which was four doors away, was similar in design but, as he owned it and was a builder by trade, he had made his scullery into a small bathroom.

Our garden was also much larger than the previous one, being in the region of 12 foot wide and 50 foot long and even with father’s shed standing in it there was still a large area left. My parents were not green fingered and my uncle’s brother Horace used to come up and dig and plant the garden with vegetables. Shortly after we moved in we had an Anderson shelter and two bunk beds delivered by the council. A suitable hole was dug at the top of the garden and the shelter was installed by the hedge which parted us from the grounds of Norwich cemetery. Father fitted up a door and a corrugated iron porch in front of the shelter and I believe my uncle put in a concrete floor. I do not remember



sleeping upstairs in this house so I can only assume that we slept on the camp beds downstairs as we did in Orchard Street. At the time of the move we did not know that our stay in this house would only last 14 months.

Just after America came into the war and occupied Horsham St Faith airfield, my friend, Ray Money, came to meet me one Saturday morning and suggested that we should go and watch the aircraft flying around. We cycled along the Cromer Road as far as the Guard House, which was on the corner of Fifers Lane opposite the public house (now a Tesco store), but found we could not see much from there. We then decided to go further out along the Cromer Road and see if we could walk through the fields between the road and the airfield to obtain a better vantage point. This proved fruitless as anti-aircraft gun emplacements were set up in the fields, so in the end we stayed close to the road by the side of an open farm gate which was about two hundred yards from one of the guns situated close to the East West runway. There were several American soldiers milling around the emplacement and eventually they beckoned us to go across. When we got to them they asked us if we could get them something to eat, as they were hungry. After a little thought we said that we might be able to get them some cakes, which for some reason we knew were not on ration, from a Bakers shop about two miles away in St. Augustines Street.

The soldiers then had a whip round and eventually gave us over £3 in cash, which we divided between us, to purchase the cakes. When we arrived at the shop it was full of ladies doing their Saturday morning shopping, so we had to wait our turn. Now it must be realised that we had, in our pockets, more than an adult's weekly wage, and these customers were buying cakes, buns or pieces of fruitcake, for their entire family and probably spending no more than two shillings (10p) each at the most. This meant that when our turn arrived, we could purchase much more than the normal shoppers and as we started to ask for large quantities the customers began to give us some dirty looks. This caused the shop assistant to question us and ask where we had obtained the money with which we were going to pay for all these cakes. I believe she thought we had stolen it from someone, but when we explained where it came from and what our mission was, she allowed us to continue with our shopping. The other customers did not like what we were doing as they could see the supplies of cakes and buns slowly disappearing. Eventually we spent our money and had a huge pile of cakes to take back but in those days the shops did not supply carrier bags, so we had to leave it all there and dash round to my friend's house to borrow his mother's shopping bags. Off we went to collect our goods and then cycled the two miles back to the soldiers. Because we had been such a long while they thought we had run off with their money. However they appeared grateful for our efforts and we received some chewing gum for our trouble, what the customers in the shop thought I have no idea.

In September 1941 we had a little excitement in the form of a German bomber (Dornier 217) being put on show at Eaton Park. It was brought to the park on the back of a RAF Queen Mary (low loader) and reassembled, except for the engines, which were left on the ground in front of it. There did not appear to be much damage and it was also standing on its own undercarriage, so I can only assume that it crash-landed somewhere. It created a lot of interest, as it was the first time anyone had been able to see an enemy aircraft at close quarters. To see the black crosses on its wings and swastikas on the tail brought to life something, which had previously only been seen on a cinema screen. While it was in the park, they even camouflaged it with branches of trees, presumably so that the enemy could not see it!



[Dornier 217 at Eaton Park](#)

Another episode during the month of September happened one night when with no air raid alarm we awoke to find several lamp posts in the Dereham Road area had a lot of wire tangled around them. No one knew what it was and to make matters worse some of the wire had small explosive devices fitted along its length. At least one ARP Warden

was seriously injured when he tried to untangle or move some of this wire, which was lying across the road. As usual, rumours were rife and people said that shells had been fired containing the wire and when they exploded the wire was deployed to get tangled around the propellers of enemy aircraft. They were more or less correct, but in fact what happened was that an RAF aircraft accidentally deployed the wire. It was, as the rumours suggested, supposed to get tangled around enemy propellers which then pulled in the explosive and thereby bringing the aircraft down. However the method of getting it there was different in that, RAF aircraft had to fly above the bombers and were supposed to drop the wire and explosives onto them. Needless to say the bomb disposal teams worked hard that day to get it all cleared away and we never saw or heard of this secret weapon again.

Considering how close Norwich was to the continent, plus the fact that we also had a considerable manufacturing and engineering industry, the city had been spared the heavy and prolonged air raids which occurred in other large cities. The few raids, which had occurred since hostilities began, were of the hit and run type causing some damage and casualties. There were many false alarms and for a long period prior to 1942 there had been no alerts whatsoever. This resulted in our anti-aircraft gun and barrage balloon defences being withdrawn and sent to protect those cities which were being subject to heavy and sustained air attack. The population of Norwich became somewhat complacent and usually ignored any air raid alert preferring instead to stay in bed and sleep. My mother and I were no exception in fact I did not even wake up when the sirens sounded. Father was of a more nervous disposition and he would always get up. However all this changed on the night of Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

### Norwich Blitz

On this night at around midnight, the siren sounded and as usual father got up and I believe, went outside. Once again I did not hear the siren, but something woke me up and I found that my mother was up and dressed and standing by the bed. She then asked me if I wanted to get up and go down to our Anderson shelter. To this day I do not know why she asked this question (unless my father had called her outside), or why that I replied that I wanted to go to the shelter. Mother then helped me to put my clothes on and we went through to the back door and outside. When we stepped outside, I remember thinking the moon is bright tonight, but then realisation crept in and I looked up and saw all these bright white lights just hanging in the sky. I had never seen anything like this before but the parachute flares were as bright as day and you could easily have read a newspaper as we walked down the garden to the shelter. At that time I did not hear any aircraft engines in fact there seemed a deathly silence over the city, the calm before the storm.

When we reached the shelter, father, mother and myself struggled through the 3-foot square door and tried to settle down in the cold damp interior. Our only light came from a small torch and I was told to lie on one of the bunks and go to sleep. This might have been possible if it had remained quiet outside, but it was not to be, within minutes we heard the ominous and distinctive drone of German aircraft engines gradually getting closer. Unfortunately most of the anti-aircraft guns had been removed from around the city but there was the occasional burst of anti-aircraft gunfire from the airfield (now Norwich Airport), which was indicative of a real air raid. Little did we realise just what a terrifying ordeal we were about to be subjected to.

Within seconds of the first bomber arriving over the city, we heard and felt the first explosions of bombs dropping nearby. This was made more terrifying because some German aircraft had a siren fitted to the rear fuselage, which emitted a high-pitched whining sound and was activated prior to commencing the bombing run. The explosions and the noise of the aircraft siren, coupled with the fear and isolation one felt cooped up in a 6 foot by 6 foot steel room, half in and half out of the ground did scare me, and I began to shake uncontrollably. What my parents were feeling at this time I do not know, but they tried to comfort me as best they could. As the raid continued some bombs were obviously landing in our neighbourhood as we continually heard debris raining down on the corrugated iron roof of the porch over the shelter door. We did not know what the debris was, but it certainly did not help me and my shaking continued throughout the air raid. After about an hour or so there was a lull in the bombing and we thought perhaps it was over, but no, once again more aircraft were overhead and it began all over again.

Because most of the anti-aircraft gun defences had been moved from the city, the German aircraft were not deflected from their mission and were able to bomb however they wished. It is difficult to put into words the continual noise that battered our eardrums during the 2 – 3 hour raid, but to put it into context, around 185 High Explosive bombs



were dropped within a mile radius of us equating roughly to one explosion every minute. In addition, several hundred incendiary bombs were also dropped which added to the general cacophony of noise. Many of these latter bombs fell in the city centre causing extensive fire damage to the large department stores, the majority of which were completely gutted. To give an idea of the ferocity of these fires, the red glow they caused in the sky, could be seen by my aunt and uncle living 40 miles away at Castle Rising. Eventually the bombing ceased, it went very quiet outside and the all clear sounded around 2am. Not knowing what to do next, we remained in the shelter and my shaking gradually subsided as I realised that the ordeal was hopefully over.

We were still wondering what to do, when we heard a noise outside and my uncle Herbert opened the shelter door. Living 4 doors further up the road at number 42, he came to see how we were and asked us to come out and go round to his shelter. This was an underground brick shelter, which he built in his back garden before the war began. Inside it was the height of luxury, with bunk beds, food storage, a chemical toilet and electric (car battery) light. We extracted ourselves from our shelter and the sight that met our eyes was totally different to that which we had last seen some three hours earlier. The sky was now dark, instead of a nice tidy garden it was now strewn with brick rubble, broken tiles and chimney pots, glass and lumps of soil. This is what we had heard falling on to the top of our shelters' corrugated iron "porch". Treading carefully over all the debris, we made our way through the passage to the street and the same scene was repeated there. Making our way up the street we went through the passageway into the garden and then down the steps into my uncle's shelter where my aunt and cousin Doreen were waiting. My cousin and I were put onto the bunks where we tried to get some sleep but shortly after arriving the sirens sounded again and we steelled ourselves for another onslaught. Fortunately nothing happened and the all clear sounded about a half an hour later and my cousin and I managed to doze off.

After a few hours sleep, we all emerged into the daylight of the new day at around 8 am to see for the first time just what had happened overnight. Everywhere we looked there was utter shambles, rubble was lying all around, roofs were without tiles, windows had disappeared, doors were hanging at crazy angles and we were still in the back yard! Carefully negotiating the debris, we passed through the passageway out into the street to a scene of devastation. Walking the few yards to our house we could see that the first 5-6 houses at the bottom of the road had disappeared and the rescue services were working feverishly on the wreckage looking for survivors. Houses on the opposite side were severely damaged. Most of the front walls and roofs had disappeared and the upper floors were hanging at precarious angles with the furniture somehow balancing over an empty void.

As one of our neighbours had found the body of a small baby lying in the road and had laid it to rest in his back garden, the police would not let us go down the passageway to the back door, so we had to enter our house by the front door. Before we could do this, we had to negotiate our way around a section of Anderson shelter, which had been blown from the back garden of a house further down the road, landing on our small front path. Considering this pathway was only 8 feet long by 3 feet wide and the section of corrugated iron was 6½ feet by 2½ feet, so accurately had it come to rest it appeared to have been laid there by hand. Our roof had lost most of the tiles leaving it open to the elements, the glass had been blown from the windows but we were lucky to some extent, because our blackout shutters, although now in tatters were fairly substantial and fitted inside, so that most of the glass dropped outside. However inside the house it was complete chaos, soot had been dislodged from the chimney and rooms were covered with the black dust. Pictures and mirrors had been dislodged from the walls, plaster had fallen from the ceilings, and crockery had been broken. It must have been traumatic for my parents to see the house in this state, but the immediate task was to get me ready for school and for my father to go to work.

The day after the blitz was one of reflection and endeavouring to come to terms with what had happened overnight. Several 250kg and 500kg bombs had exploded in our near vicinity, including some in the cemetery at the bottom of our garden, as well as the one, which destroyed houses 50 yards away at the bottom of the road. The total weight of high explosive bombs dropped on the city amounted to some 50 tons, killing 162 people and injuring a further 600. A school friend of mine, Peter Brighton, who sat immediately in front of me in class, was one of those killed. We just accepted what had happened and got on with life, not like today where every time a tragedy occurs, counselling appears to be a necessity. My grandfather was one of those injured. He was going into the surface shelter opposite his house in Raglan Street when a bomb exploded nearby and he was blown over by the blast and broke his wrist.



Bomb Crater – Junction Barn Road, Grapes Hill, Dereham Road, St Benedicts



Gate Dereham Road/Barn Road – Regal Cinema



St Benedicts

Only vague memories of this day remain. I know that school was cancelled, but I do not remember going there to find out. It would have been difficult to get there anyway, as the bottom of our road was virtually impassable due to the debris from the demolished houses. However, some friends and I did get on our bicycles and wander around the local area looking at the damage and watching the various services working on repairs. One memory still vivid is seeing the massive crater at the bottom of Grapes Hill with smoke and steam rising from it. Because of the tremendous amount of damage this bomb caused, the rumours circulating at the time were that a parachute mine had exploded. This was not true as none were dropped that night. Two 1800kg bombs were dropped and it could have been one of those, especially in view of the size of the crater and the destruction, which had been caused in the area. Coming back up the Dereham Road we also saw the damage at the Old Palace Road and Heigham Road junction. The Dial public house (now Tesco's) was gutted and the surface shelter on its forecourt had its 6-inch reinforced concrete roof dislodged but the brickwork was mainly intact. The Gas Company showroom opposite was also demolished, as were the houses on the other two corners. Surprisingly the old Gas Company plot of land together with the corner opposite, have never been redeveloped and to this day contain only large billboards.

On Tuesdays, Market Gardeners from around the county would come to the Norwich Cattle Market (now the top of the Castle Mall), to sell their produce to the local greengrocers. In spite of all that had gone on during the night, the market still went ahead the morning after the blitz. As usual, my uncle brought vegetables for his customers, but instead of returning home after concluding his business, he came to see whether we needed any help. Presumably when he saw the state of our house, he must have told my parents that we should stay with them at Shotesham until repairs could be completed. As he still had business to complete he arranged to come and fetch us later in the day. On his return, we loaded a few pieces of furniture and personal effects plus the bicycles belonging to my father and myself, onto the lorry and then proceeded to leave the city. Little did we realise at the time that it would be another 18 months before we returned to live in the city once more. This was obviously going to be a new experience for me as my previous excursions into the country had been limited to a Sunday visit to my aunt and uncle and now a whole new vista was to open up.

The farmhouse attached to my uncle's smallholding was a large building and consequently the rooms inside were also larger. We were given the use of their front room, from which they had removed most of their furniture so that we could have somewhere to sleep. A double bed was installed for my parents and a camp bed for me and we had a chest of drawers in which to keep our clothes. Meals were going to be difficult as there were now ten people, four adults and six children, needing to sit down to eat. Luckily my aunt's dining table was large enough to seat eight and my cousin Ted and myself had a small table to ourselves. It was teatime in our new surroundings before we were able to sit down and have a meal, as we had not been able to prepare food before leaving Norwich. At least we were able to get a good nights rest after all the trauma of the previous 24 hours.



Falgate Farm

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April arrived and after breakfast, my cousins all went off to school, my father left for work in Norwich on his bicycle, a journey of 6-7 miles which he was to undertake many times in the weeks and months to come. With nothing else to do myself, I proceeded to take in the surroundings I now found myself in. Apart from being a Market Gardener, my uncle was also the local coal merchant and the main house was surrounded by several outhouses, which contained various items of equipment used in the operation of the two businesses. There was also a pigsty containing three or four pigs and a large fenced in paddock containing, what are now called free-range chickens and a few geese. Although the farmhouse was large, the facilities available were very basic. There was no drinkable running water, the water from the tap in the kitchen was only suitable for washing.

Drinking water had to be obtained, in buckets, from a spring situated on the common. This spring was about 18 inches below the surrounding surface. A wooden box had been built around it to protect the water and also to stop the cows grazing on the common, from getting to the water. The water at the bottom of the box was crystal clear and you would see the level reduce as water was removed. Within minutes the level would be back to normal but it never overflowed out of the box. Every day, winter and summer, my uncle would walk the 150 yards to the common to obtain our drinking water. Unfortunately, with 10 people now in the house, two buckets of water did not last very long and eventually my uncle invested in a large galvanised container on wheels, which held around 25 gallons, thereby saving time and effort.



Shotesham Common – Arrow indicates the Spring



Toilet facilities were even more basic. There was no flush lavatory as I had been used to, all that was available was a small brick building about 50 feet away from the house built over a pit. Inside was a wooden seat, or rather a double seat, a lower one for children and a higher one for adults. Not too bad in summer, apart from the smell and flies, but very drafty in winter. Someone had the job of digging out the pit every 3-4 months and disposing of the contents. Phew!! This was my introduction to country living and I was not very impressed. So, at the end of my first full day in the country, I went off to bed.

Because Norwich had been virtually defenceless on the Monday night, mobile anti-aircraft guns had been strategically placed around the city on the Tuesday and Wednesday and by the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May there were also 35 barrage balloon sites in operation. Air raid sirens were not available to alert people living in country areas so the only way of knowing that an alert was in progress, would be if explosions of bombs or anti-aircraft shells were heard. This is what happened on the night of Wednesday the 29<sup>th</sup> April. I was woken up by the commotion of all my cousins coming into our room and was told to get up as there was another heavy raid taking place on Norwich. We could hear some muffled explosions plus the crack of anti-aircraft fire more or less overhead and all the children were told to get under the large heavy oak table in our room. Fortunately the noise of explosions was nothing like we had been through on the Monday so I was not quite so scared. After a period of quiet, the adults considered that the alert was over so everyone went back to bed.

Thursday morning dawned and my cousins went off to school as usual but my father did not go to work that morning. Whether this was because it was his half-day off in the afternoon, or whether it was because a decision had been made for us to collect some more furniture etc. and stay with our relations, I am not sure. However in the afternoon, mother father and myself squeezed into the cab of my uncle's lorry and off we went towards Norwich with the object of picking up some more of our possessions. I enjoyed the drive and was looking forward to seeing our house again and picking up some of my own personal things. When we turned into our road something did not seem quite right, there was a lot of debris strewn about, and we could only proceed slowly up the road. It began to dawn on me that there was a gap in the terrace where our house should have been and the first house left standing was my uncle Herbert's. We now realised that a bomb had fallen in our back garden and destroyed all the houses. In fact, we heard later, that three 500kg bombs had fallen between our house and the houses that had been destroyed at the bottom of the road on the Monday night. Helena Road would never be the same again. All the houses from number 42 (my uncles) right down to Dereham Road had now been completely demolished and the houses on the opposite side of the road had been seriously damaged.

Our trip to pick up more belongings had now become a nonentity. We got out of the lorry and surveyed the scene of utter devastation in front of us. At the edge of the bomb crater was our Anderson shelter, still intact. What would have happened to us had we been in there is impossible to say. Perhaps we may have got away with some serious injury but with the explosion in such close proximity it is probable that we would all have been killed by the blast. Our neighbours, Mr and Mrs Hunt were in the cellar of their house and were unfortunately killed. Moving around the crater, it was obvious that all the items that had previously formed part of our home were no longer in a condition where they could be salvaged. I remember seeing many of my comics (Hotspur and Champion) strewn around in the rubble, the pages blowing in the wind. Although we were able to recover a couple of books that had not been damaged, all our furniture, crockery, personal effects, photographs and toys had been destroyed. It must have been devastating for my parents to stand there looking at the destruction around them, knowing that all their belongings, which they had saved hard for, had now been reduced to scrap. I believe that there was a compensation scheme available to people who had lost all their possessions, but that would in no way help my parents to come to terms with the loss of home and memories. On this sad occasion we returned to my uncle's lorry knowing that our only possessions were those we had taken with us two days before. We also had to come to terms with the knowledge that we were now officially homeless and for a period of time, we would have to rely on the charity of our relations, for shelter.

This was a particular difficult time for father's side of the family as my Aunt May and Uncle Herbert, who lived at number 42 Helena Road, had their house made uninhabitable by the bomb that dropped on our house. My grandfather and Aunt Doris, who lived in Raglan Street, had the house and workshop destroyed the same night by incendiary bombs. Only my uncle Gerald and aunt Hilda escaped being made homeless as they lived at the top of Ketts Hill on the eastern side of the city which suffered least from the bombing. I believe my aunt May, uncle Herbert and my cousin

Doreen stayed with the Eastoe families in Costessey for a time and my aunt Doris and grandfather stayed with my uncle Gerald. They eventually found new properties in Costessey and continued to live there after the war. In fact my grandfather bought his dwelling, an old railway coach, which had been converted into two bedrooms and a lounge. Prior to moving in he had a small kitchen added and this provided a very compact bungalow where both he and my aunt lived for many years.



Grandfather & Aunt Doris with Uncle Gerald and Geraldine  
In front of the railway carriage home

Throughout the city, the two raids accounted for some 13,000 residential houses being damaged and another 1000 totally destroyed. The shops in the centre, bounded by Brigg Street, Orford Place, Red Lion Street and Theatre Street were all destroyed and 20 factories had either been destroyed or seriously damaged. One of the 1000kg bombs dropped on the Wednesday night penetrated the side wall of the Carlton cinema in All Saints Green leaving a hole about the size of a standard door. The damage was thought to have been caused by blast, so the cinema continued to operate as normal. It was not until several days later, and after hundreds of people had visited the cinema, that the bomb was discovered. Bearing in mind the size of the bomb, if it had exploded in this confined area during a performance, casualties would undoubtedly have been heavy.

Having spent a couple of days as a “country boy” and not really liking it that much, I realised on the way back to Shotesham, that I would probably be staying there for a time, so I would have to get used to a different way of life. I did not really appreciate at this time of my life, just how peaceful and tranquil life in a rural village could be. This was especially true of Shotesham, probably due to the fact that its situation did not attract through traffic, thereby allowing it to retain, even to this day, its own quiet charm. In those days there was a great community spirit, generated no doubt by the fact that the village was reasonably compact and the inhabitants socialised as they met up in the butchers shop, grocery store, post office and the Globe public house. Village Fetes and Whist Drives were always well attended and a poster in the various shops usually advertised these events. These posters were “works of art” produced, at the request of the Head teacher of the village school, by myself and another boy, during our art classes at school. Sadly many villages have now lost this togetherness due to changing lifestyles bringing about the demise of the village shops and with it the daily socialising that used to occur.

### Living in the Country

I did not realise that I would be expected to attend the local school and in my naïve way thought I would be able to wander about all day and eventually return to the city. I was unaware of what was really happening and was surprised when my mother told me that I was to start at the village school the following week. I did protest, as I wanted to return to my old school in the city, but my protests fell on deaf ears. So on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 1942, I set off up the hill with my cousins, into the school playground where there were many new faces, although much to my surprise there were also one or two from my old school who had also been made homeless on that fateful night. This small school consisted of approximately 50 pupils and was completely different to those I had previously attended in the city, where the infant, junior and senior pupils were always completely separate from each other. Here all ages from 4½ -14 years were being taught under the same roof in two “classrooms”. I say “classrooms” but this is not really an adequate description. When entering the building you walked into a large, 40-foot by 60-foot room, which was divided by a

curtain across its width. On one side there were three or four rows of desks of the “senior” school and on the other side of the curtain were more desks catering for the “junior” school. Those children between the ages of 4½ - 7 had their own separate classroom off the main room.

As I was nearly 12 years of age, I was told to go to the senior side of the curtain, where to my amazement they were still sitting in the old “cast iron” twin desks which I had long since left behind in the infant school. So began my country education experience, sitting in the same class as my cousin Donny who was 14 and my cousin Ted who was 12. Because the school catered for such a wide and diverse age group with only three staff, I suppose it was inevitable that the educational standards achieved by the pupils would not be as high as a city school. The pupils also had to contend with the distraction of different lessons being carried out on either side of a curtain, which presumably did not help their concentration. In fact, one boy slightly older than myself was in the “senior” class and he could neither read nor write let alone comprehend the subjects being taught. Although I always considered my city schooling hard work, here I found that I was way ahead of my country schoolmates, which made it much easier to become top of the class. This was embarrassing at times, as I kept getting whispered requests on how to arrive at the answers to some of the maths problems.



Shotesham School Photograph 1942

One of my favourite lessons was woodwork, mainly because it was held at a school 4½ miles away in the village of Kirstead. There were no school buses to take you there, so every Tuesday afternoon there would be a mass exodus of senior boys, cycling out of Shotesham, hell bent on arriving at the woodwork class by 2 pm. All very nice when the sun was shining, but it was a different story when it was snowing or pouring with rain. However this was tempered a little by the fact that we were paid a penny per mile, for wear and tear to our cycles, every time we attended. As the total return journey was 9 miles we were credited with 9d (3¾p), which was usually paid every 6 – 8 weeks and became a handy addition to our pocket money.

At this school we did at least have warning of an impending visit by the dreaded dentist or doctor, with the arrival of a caravan in the playground. As spare classroom space was virtually none existent in country schools, these professionals travelled around with their own mobile surgeries. We would be called out one by one for our examinations and if the dentist found any problems he would return at a later date to carry out any remedial action. On one occasion we came out of school to find that a strange dark green caravan had been parked in the playground. This caused some speculation as to what its purpose was, especially as it was completely windowless but with a door at each end. We had been told to ensure that we had to bring our gas masks with us the following day and assumed that this caravan had something to do with an inspection of some sort. On arrival at school the next day it was explained to us that our masks were to be inspected for a good fit, after which, we would be taken outside to the caravan. Then came the exciting part, the van would be filled with tear gas and after putting our masks on, we would be led through to ensure that our masks did not leak. After all the children had passed through, the senior class had the option of going through again but this time without putting the mask on. Needless to say all the lads went through,



but we regretted it later in the classroom as our clothes had been contaminated and we spent the rest of the day with streaming eyes.

On Sundays all my cousins went to Sunday school after which the two boys, Donny and Ted, would go next door to the church, where they were members of the choir. I was eventually coerced into going to Sunday school but it required a little more persuasion before I succumbed and joined the choir. Each Sunday the choir would form up in the sacristy for the procession to the choir stalls. All the choirboys would usually sit in the same place each week and my position was facing the organ on the opposite side of the gangway. Because the church did not have electricity, it meant that the organ was operated by air and this required someone to pump air into the bellows. One of our friends had this job and he sat in a small alcove beside the organ. When the organist was ready to play, he would get up and start pumping a large wooden bar up and down to keep the bellows filled with air, continuing until the hymn finished. The alcove he sat in, was tucked out of view of everyone except myself and the boys next to me, so while he was taking his rest periods, or during the sermon, he would pull faces and do all in his power to make us laugh. On many occasions he was successful and we would get a fit of the giggles which would bring a disparaging look from the men sitting in the choir opposite us and we were usually told off after the service. Mind you it did pass the time when the vicar gave a long sermon!



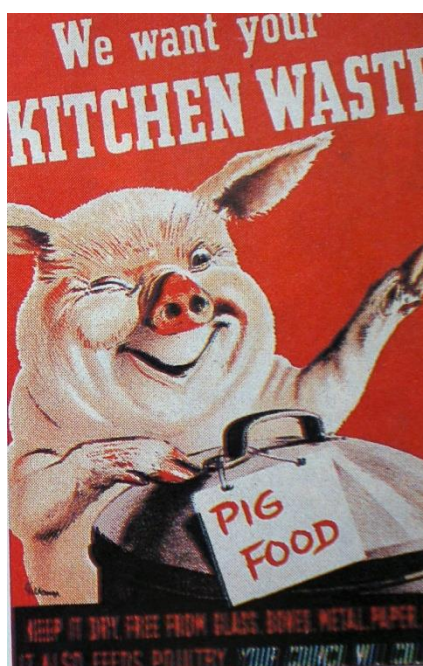
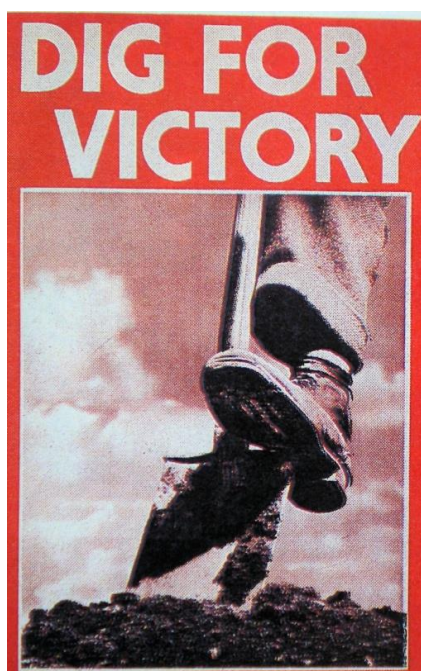
All Saints Church – School and Head Teachers house

Being in the choir did have its advantages, as it allowed us out of the house every Tuesday evening to go to the vicarage for choir practice and during the dark winter nights we would take a torch to help us on our way. When we made our way home around 8 o'clock the village would be very quiet, deserted and dark which gave us the incentive to be a bit mischievous and turn on our torches to see how far the beam of light would travel. We considered this to be very daring, as we knew that we were not supposed to show any light but it certainly lit up the branches of the trees. The choir practice only lasted for about half an hour and then we could play games for another hour, which made it more like going to a youth centre. The vicar was also a bit of a magician and each week he would demonstrate a trick and if someone could tell him how it was done then they would get to keep the items he used. We also had the advantage over other boys in the village when we had snow during the winter as the vicar had a small professionally made wooden sledge that he let us use. This would only seat one person so we used to take turns riding it down the hill at the side of the church and because it was properly manufactured with metal runners it would slice through the snow at an astonishing speed. As the hill was quite steep we had to sit, rather than lay, on the sledge and this meant that we were unable to steer or stop it properly. The outcome of this was that we usually finished up on the very edge of the beck (stream) and sometimes we were caught up in the barbed wire coils, which had been placed around the small road bridge.



The hill we used for sledging

From time to time the government issued posters advertising, or suggesting, ways in which the population could undertake something to help with the war effort. One of these posters advocated, “dig for victory” by growing your own vegetables and I think the headmistress, whose cottage adjoined the school, considered this to be a good idea but did not like all the work that this would entail. So as a compromise she decided to divide up her front garden and give a small plot to each of the senior boys in the school to cultivate. One period each week was set-aside for the boys to go out and look after their patch. Because there were only a limited number of plots available I had to wait until someone left before I could partake of this outdoor activity. I suppose I did learn something about the growing of vegetables and what weeds looked like, but it was not really my forte and I suspect that I must have had an ulterior motive for taking it on.



Ministry of Home Security Posters

One good thing about going to school was that I was able to make my own friends and become more integrated into the country life. A bicycle was a virtual necessity as friends could be spread over a wide area of the village and it was lucky that one of the items we brought from the city on that first day was my bicycle. With my new friends we would roam around the surrounding countryside and villages, through the fields, woods and common land, climbing trees, looking for bird nests as well as plodding through the streams and ditches. One thing I soon found out very quickly was that shoes were not the ideal footwear for roaming around in the wet and muddy conditions of the countryside even in the summer. It was not long before I was wearing the more realistic leather boots with studs in the sole (hob nail boots), or the ubiquitous rubber boots (Wellingtons).



As a city lad roaming around the countryside, it was no surprise that I was on a considerable learning curve, which could not be taught successfully by textbooks. You were very aware of the changes occurring through the seasons. In the spring, the hedgerows came back to life, the birds began to sing, wild flowers appeared and everywhere turned green and bright. Come the autumn, conkers fell from the trees as did the sweet chestnuts and acorns, the colours changed to brown and gold prior to the leaves dropping and the drab look of winter beckoned. I soon became proficient in identifying the various species of birds and wildlife and their habitat as well as all the different bushes, trees and wild flowers growing in the hedgerows.

All this knowledge was an asset to me as I began to participate in the various country pastimes of my new friends. One of these was the collecting of birds' eggs, which is now a criminal offence, but then it was a hobby on a par with cigarette card collecting. Children living in the countryside had a great respect for the birds. Nests were never vandalised and if you came across one with only two eggs in, none were removed, even if it was one of those you desperately wanted. Also, if you had an egg that someone else wanted, you would exchange it for one that you did not have. In this way the number of eggs removed from nests was limited. Because only the shells were collected, my friends taught me how to prick a hole in each end of the egg with a pin and then blow through them to remove the yoke. For some reason this was the part I disliked most and it was a long time before I could bring myself to do it. With the shells being very fragile, collections were usually kept in cardboard boxes lined and covered with cotton wool. By the time I returned to the city I had a large collection housed in old shoeboxes. It would have been difficult for me to look after it when we moved, so I left the collection with my cousins.

In the spring, my cousin Ted and I would go out into the fields and hedgerows on the day before my uncle was due to go to market, to pick wild flowers. We would then tie them into small bunches and my uncle would take them to market to sell to his customers. Sometimes we picked enough to fill two trays and we looked forward to a return of around 5 shillings (25p) per tray. This gave us two shillings and sixpence (13½ p) each, which was quite a sum in those days, bearing in mind our pocket money rarely exceeded 6 pence (2½ p) per week. It was a little more profitable in the autumn when we would seek out the sweet chestnut trees. It was much harder work to obtain these as it necessitated throwing lumps of wood into the trees to dislodge the chestnuts and then open the shells and place the nuts in bags to take home. There we would weigh them out and put about 14 pounds of nuts into a tray which my uncle would once again take to market and sell for us. We tried to make up a total of two trays each time and could look forward to a return of approximately 10 shillings per tray. Another advantage was that we could get the nuts for a period of two and sometimes three weeks, so it was well worth all the effort collecting them.



Wild Cowslips picked for market

It was still possible, in the 1940's, to purchase carbide, which is a compound of carbon used for making acetylene gas and some people were still using it in cycle lamps. I am not exactly sure how it worked in these lamps but I know it was necessary to wet the carbide to produce a flammable gas, which was then lit to provide the light. Very few of these lights existed but when some of our friends found a few crystals in their fathers shed we would go off to a quiet



spot in the woods with an old treacle tin and proceed to have a bit of fun. What we did was to place the piece of carbide in the tin and then spit on it. This would start the gas process and we would quickly put the lid tightly on the tin and clear the area. After a minute or so there would be an extremely loud explosion and if we were lucky the lid would be blown off and we could start all over again. If we placed the lid on too tightly then the gas built up to such an extent that the tin would split at the seam thereby spoiling our fun.

Occasionally we would dig a small hole and quickly place the tin in this and cover it up and wait for it to explode throwing dirt in the air much like a real bomb. Sometimes, if we could not find a suitable tin, we would use a Corona drink bottle. This was a dangerous exercise as the bottle had a sprung cork held shut by strong wire. If we used these we would carry out the same procedure, as before, close the top and then ensure we moved a long way from our "bomb". This was necessary because when it exploded the cork could in no way be blown off and the bottle itself exploded with glass flying everywhere. We all knew there was a serious risk of injury by doing this but we always ensured that we took suitable precautions to minimise the danger. Today the nanny state will not even let children play "conkers" in the school playground without wearing safety glasses, in case the conker breaks and hurts them.



Water Reservoir – now basement of Debenhams

By the end of 1942 the trauma of the April bombing had receded and in the city the debris from the destroyed houses and shops had been removed leaving empty spaces and large derelict areas, especially in the city centre. The department stores and shops that had been affected had all relocated to other premises and were back in business. A large water reservoir over 100 feet square and 4 feet deep was built in what had been the basement of Curls (Debenhams) department store. This had been put in place after the events of the heavy raids, to ensure that the fire service could obtain water in the city centre should the main water supply be cut off. To my knowledge it was never used as such, although when the Americans "invaded" some, after a few pints in the local pubs, used it as a swimming pool until their "snowdrops" (military police) arrived on the scene and apprehended them. After the war the reservoir was demolished and the area was used as a car park for many years until Debenhams was rebuilt.

As things were now somewhat quieter in war terms, plus the fact that I was missing the city life, I asked my mother if I could travel up to Norwich on Saturday afternoons so that I could go to the cinema and to my surprise she said yes. So for the rest of my enforced stay in the country I would catch the bus after lunch and take myself off to the pictures. I eventually extended my excursion so that I could go on the morning bus as this allowed more time to get to the appropriate cinema in time to see the start of the film and come out early enough to catch the bus back. My mother eventually arranged with her sister Maud, who lived in Pottergate, for me to go there for some lunch before setting off for the cinema and this became a regular Saturday outing for me until we eventually returned to Norwich.

While visiting my aunt one Saturday afternoon, a thunderstorm occurred over the city with the usual lightening and rain. What I did not know was that the Barrage Balloon, which was stationed about a quarter of a mile away in Chapel Field Gardens, was, for some reason, still deployed. During the storm the balloon was struck by lightning and I happened to look out of the window just as a large ball of fire was slowly descending from the cloud towards the ground behind St. Johns Catholic Church. It was fortunate that, by the time it finally reached the ground, the fire, and with it the balloon fabric, had virtually disappeared. However the balloon had obviously drifted in the wind, resulting

in 4000 or 5000 feet of cable being draped over roads and houses for quite a distance from the balloon site. The falling cable injured no one but how the RAF personnel retrieved it I do not know, however I am sure that they were grateful that there was very little traffic around to cause problems.

When we left the city in 1942, America had only just come into the war and the friendly invasion had not fully arrived in Norwich. By the time I had begun my Saturday forays, the crowds in the city had been swelled by hundreds of off duty American servicemen who were now mingling with the local population, each striving to get to grips with the others dialect and humour. Mind you this did not put off the local girls who were drawn to the smart uniforms and the seemingly unending supply of nylons and other unobtainable goodies that were handed out. With all the Americans now coming into the city for some Rest and Relaxation there was a corresponding number of "Snowdrops". They were smartly dressed in their white helmets and white belt and pistol holsters, riding around on their Harley Davidson motorbikes keeping their contemporaries in order.

There were also many jeeps and large aviation petrol tankers, with their clanking earthing chains, rumbling through the narrow streets, in all, a very different city to the one I had previously known. At that time there was still animosity between the black and white Americans and they tended to segregate themselves so that on a night out in Norwich the pubs also became segregated. Probably the only pub in Norwich that did not have this problem was the Jolly Butchers on Ber Street owned by Antoinette Hannant who was better known as Black Anna. This pub was well known in the city because, as a jazz and blues singer Black Anna would entertain her customers every evening and this overcame any thought of segregation. The reason she was known as Black Anna was that she had jet black hair tied in a bun and always wore black clothes. This gave her a very formidable look, which, no doubt helped to keep her customers in order.

Saturdays in the city was all hustle and bustle, with all the country folk coming to town for a day out on what was known as market day. This was the day when the farmers would bring their livestock to Norwich to be sold on the Cattle Market, which was situated on the site that is now occupied by Anglia Television and the park on top of the Castle Mall. This whole area was covered with pens to hold cattle, sheep and pigs and there was a separate area beside what is now the Le Rouen Pub, where they would sell chickens, rabbits and other small animals. A large number of cows would be brought to market in lorries but some used to travel by train to City station. On arrival they would be off loaded and the drovers (men with sticks) would then gradually guide them up Westwick Street through Charing Cross and up St Andrews Hill along Bank Plain and across the top of Prince of Wales Road to the appropriate pens on the Cattle Market. Occasionally confusion would occur if one of the cows took fright and decided to run off in a totally different direction to the main body hotly pursued by a couple of the drovers. After the cattle had been bought or sold, this procedure was reversed and animals would be moved from the cattle market back to City Station for onward transmission to their new home.

Living in the country made the war seem like a distant dream, it certainly did not affect us as children and village life continued as it had always done. Our parents might have had a different outlook, but it did not permeate down to us as we carried on with our normal activities. Things may have been different if the Germans had carried out air attacks during the day, so I suppose we were fortunate that they confined most of their raids to the night time period. However this disturbance was not as great as it would have been in the city because we were not assailed by the wailing of the air raid sirens, although, occasionally, we would have to get up during the night when loud explosions were heard nearby. Obviously we were aware of all the daily movements of the allied aircraft from the amount of engine noise we heard, as bombers climbed and formed into squadrons, before departing for the continent.

The only outward sign of the war in the village were the coils of barbed wire along the fence parting the common land from the road, plus a slit trench, which contained a mounting for a Spigot Gun. The local company of Home Guard had dug the trench at the top of the hill in front of the war memorial, presumably because the position was some 50 – 60 feet above the road and gave a commanding view of the surrounding countryside.



Spigot Mortar

The local Home Guard detachment did put on a display one weekend in the school playground, showing off their weapons and expertise and actually set up their Spigot mortar in the slit trench. At a set time all the villagers gathered on the hill behind the trench to watch as the gunners demonstrated the mortar by firing several dummy bombs down the length of the common. Today this would have been considered extremely dangerous as there were houses on either side of the common and one of the bombs could easily have deviated from its intended trajectory and landed on a house, or worse still, a person could have been hit. However no problems occurred and after completing this exercise there was a mass exodus of Home Guard to the far end of the common where they had to search for the bombs, which landed in the marshy ground over a half a mile away.

Like most youngsters during the war, my friends and I became interested in all the aeroplanes we saw flying around and Sunday afternoons we would meet up to decide which airfield to visit as Shotesham was roughly midway between the two American airfields of Seething and Hardwick. Both airfields were approximately 8 miles from the village but we usually opted for Hardwick which for some reason seemed closer than Seething. Surprisingly we had no difficulty finding our way to the airfields, even though all road signs had been removed to confuse the enemy should they invade! It would usually take us about half an hour to cycle the 8 miles and once in the vicinity we would check which runway was in use and endeavour to get as close to the end of it as possible. Once there we had a grandstand position to watch the B24 Liberators taking off and landing and on occasions we were lucky enough to see the odd captured German aircraft, usually a Heinkel or Dornier, flying around. Considering there was a war in progress, security at these airfields seemed virtually non-existent as we would sometimes go as far as the aircraft dispersals and watch the servicemen carrying out maintenance. Mind you we did occasionally get told to move off by the American police (Snowdrops) if they happened to be patrolling around, but otherwise the ordinary servicemen did not seem to mind us being there.

Another of our little weekend expeditions involved cycling to Shotesham Mill and climbing over the fence into the park of Shotesham Hall. The reason for this was that we got to hear that soldiers had built a raft, for I presume, river crossing practice and this was usually tied up to the riverbank. I am not sure whether soldiers were actually living in the grounds of the hall or whether they used the area and river for training purposes, as we never saw anyone when we were down there. We did, however, find the raft, made from wooden planks roped together to form a 12-foot square, which in turn was precariously roped to four floats consisting of empty 50-gallon oil drums. Once we had made this discovery, we hunted around and found several old tree branches about 9 feet long and 2 inches thick, which we could use to punt the raft around on the river. Then half a dozen of us would jump on this contraption and spend the afternoon punting up and down the river. I know this does not appear to be very exciting, but bearing in mind that the river was 5-6 feet deep and we were not supposed to be there in the first place, plus the fact that not one of us could swim, it did give us a thrill.





Did not quite make it as far as rear of mill due to proximity of house

We knew that Army dispatch riders and the local Home Guard occasionally used a local disused sand quarry, in which to practice their skills. The army would practice riding their motorcycles in the sandy terrain as well as riding them up the steep sides of the quarry and the Home Guard used it for firing practice. So when we felt like a little excitement we would cycle to the quarry and try to emulate the dispatch riders by riding our bicycles down some of the less steep sandy slopes. Even these modest slopes appeared steep when you were balancing on the edge before moving off at what appeared to be a terrifying angle and speed. I must say that we found it very exhilarating riding a bicycle in this way, but I suppose that it would have been much easier on today's mountain bikes.

While we were there we would also look around to see if the Home Guard had left any empty shell cases after their firing practice. These were mostly small .22 cases, although we sometimes found some larger brass .303 cases. If we found any .22 cases during the winter months, we would use these to make a small banger. To do this, we would cut the end off a couple of matches and place them in the shell case, then flatten the open end and fold it over to seal it. The reason for doing this in the winter was that a coal fire heated the school classroom and we were allowed to throw waste pieces of paper on it during lessons. This meant that we could easily hide one of these small explosives in the paper and we would then casually walk up to the fire during a lesson and throw this concoction into the flames and return to our seat. After a few minutes the metal case became hot enough to fire the match heads and as it was all sealed up, there would be a small explosion that was powerful enough to sometimes throw the odd hot ember from the fire. The teacher never caught on to what we were doing and blamed it on the poor quality of coal that was being sold during the war! It was surprising that we were never found out, because the .22 shell case would have remained in the ashes when these were removed prior to lighting the fire the next day. I must add that the fire did have a fireguard surrounding it for the safety of the pupils, so any hot embers falling from the fire remained on the hearth and did not reach the classroom floor.

After leaving school one afternoon, my friend and I were walking to his house when, halfway across the common, we became aware of the noise of a very low flying aircraft. As it came into view over Falgate Farm we saw that it was a B24 from Hardwick and it was so low that it had to pull up in order to clear All Saints Church tower. We only caught a fleeting glance and less than 30 seconds later we heard a loud explosion and saw a huge pall of black smoke appear over the tops of the trees. We ran the rest of the way to my friend's house to get his bicycle and then dashed back over the common to the road where I jumped onto the crossbar and we set off towards the smoke. The aircraft had crashed into a small wooded plantation in Grub Street about half a mile beyond the village and 3 or 4 fields from the road. We left the bicycle in a hedge and proceeded across the fields towards the smoke. At the edge of one of the fields we came across the body of an American officer, probably the pilot, still attached to a partly deployed parachute, who, we could only assume, had stayed with the aircraft to ensure that it missed the houses on the edge of the village.

The wood where the aircraft had crashed was only about 400 yards away and the adults who had arrived on the scene stopped us from going any further and told us to "clear off". We would not have gone any closer anyway as there was

a large amount of ammunition exploding and Very lights were shooting into the air like fireworks. Fortunately there were no bombs on board otherwise there could have been pieces of shrapnel passing very close to us. After watching for a while the local policeman arrived on his bicycle and cleared people from the immediate vicinity. As it would have been extremely difficult to get fire vehicles to the site, plus the fact that there was no danger to people or buildings, the fire was left to burn itself out. The next day we learned from our school friends who lived further away from the village, that all the crew had been killed as they also bailed out at low altitude. We never did hear why the aircraft came down and can only surmise that it was because of some malfunction.

There were occasions when an army unit would come to the village to carry out attack and defence manoeuvres using Falgate Farm as the defence position. I assume that my uncle was advised that these exercises were to take place, as it was impossible for him to continue working or move about the farmyard until it was all over. I suspect that the military chose the farm for these exercises as the officer's and umpires could watch the whole battle scenario unfold from the top of the church hill less than 100 yards away. This position gave them an unimpeded view across the fields and common and enabled them to see that the soldiers' tactics were effective. After 60 years this view has now disappeared due to self-sown trees growing up alongside the stream at the bottom of the hill.

It was fortunate for us kids, that for some reason, these exercises were always carried out after school and when we saw the lorries disgorging troops we would hurry indoors, and change our clothes then run up the hill to get in position behind the officers to watch the battle unfold. As the soldiers used blank .303 ammunition and thunderflashes (representing hand grenades) we would keep a watchful eye on them to see where and how many of each were used. The army never cleared up after these exercises, so my cousins and I would dash back to the farm after the cease fire to pick up the spent brass shell cases and also look for any unexploded or partly exploded thunderflashes.

The reason we looked for the thunderflashes was because they were like large tubular fireworks about 8 inches in length and of course the exciting thing for us lads was that they exploded with a loud bang. All that was needed to ignite them was to rub the side of a safety matchbox across the top of the thunderflash and this would set off the fuse giving about a 15 second delay before exploding. I well remember we were lucky on one occasion to find both a partly exploded and also a complete thunderflash, which we surreptitiously picked up and casually walked off to the nearby woods to examine. The partly exploded thunderflash just had the cardboard "lid" on the end blown off leaving a one inch diameter tube, the inside of which was thinly coated with a grey looking powder. Not knowing what to do with it, I convinced my cousin that it was alright for him to hold one end while I placed a lighted match into the open end. Having struck the match and standing to one side, I more or less threw it into the tube and the next thing we knew there was a searing bright flash of flame about 4 feet long shooting out of the end. For a second we were both blinded and my cousin quickly dropped the offending article and we ran hell for leather up the path. Fortunately for us it did not explode, but the experience frightened us and we threw the complete thunderflash away and went back to our normal safe country pursuits.

Prior to going to school on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1943 I remember standing in the living room when the hall door opened and a woman who I did not know told me to ask my aunt to send for the doctor. I had no idea what was going on but I passed the message on and went off to school. I now know that this strange woman was the district nurse and she had arrived sometime before I came down for my breakfast. What I also did not know was that my mother was pregnant and therefore, when I arrived home for dinner, I was surprised to be told that I now had a little brother and was taken through to see this little sleeping bundle. As he was so small I can only presume that he had been born prematurely and this is what all the commotion had been about earlier in the day. I can only guess that the unexpected arrival was the reason why his bed had been made up in a drawer taken from a chest of drawers. Looking back, I did not take much notice of this new addition to the family; probably because we were not in our own home and I had my cousins to play with, therefore I left it to others to play with my new brother.

With the arrival of my brother I presume that my parents decided that it was about time that they found alternative accommodation and as my father knew just about everyone in Norwich he soon found someone who might have a house available. The only problem was that this house had been hit by an incendiary bomb and had been damaged by fire and was being repaired. Nevertheless the landlady told father that he could rent the house provided he moved in immediately the repairs were completed. The reason for the quick move was that housing in the city was at a premium and the council had powers to take over any houses that stood empty and put in their own occupants. This compulsory

letting was something that landlords disliked as they were unable to put in tenants of their choice. So it was that, on Saturday 11 December 1943, we left the countryside and returned to the city and our new home at 164 Bowthorpe Road.

### Back to the City

At the time of our move back to the city, I cannot recollect leaving Shotesham School or actually moving any furniture in to our new house. As we had lost the majority of our possessions in the blitz, I can only assume that my parents had priority to obtain new “utility” furniture and fitted out the new property during the week while I was at school. This house, which backed on to the West Norwich Hospital, was similar to the one destroyed in Helena Road, in that it had three bedrooms, a front room, living room and kitchen. There was an outside coalhouse and lavatory but still no bathroom and there was a 5-foot wall, dividing us from our next-door neighbours, on which we could hang our galvanised bath. The garden was also much smaller and there was not enough space available for an Anderson Shelter, so we were given one of the indoor Morrison Shelters. This was erected in our front room but I have no idea who put it together as my father was not a very practical person. Because of our previous experience during the night of the blitz my parents decided that we should continue to sleep downstairs and as this monstrosity took up most of the space in the front room it was not possible to put in beds. So a compromise was forthcoming in that my bed was made up inside the shelter and my parents placed a mattress and their bed on the top. My brother was at this stage sleeping in a carrycot and this was placed across the arms of a chair next to our sleeping accommodation.

By the time we returned to the city, the war was going much more in our favour and although there were still several night air raid alerts, we did not have to endure the severe bombing that occurred during the blitz. I think people were somewhat more cautious because of their blitz experience and this was the reason why families took precautions and went into the shelters when an alert sounded and we were no exception. The first air raid, which occurred after moving in, saw us all get up and then sit on my bed in the Morrison Shelter until the all clear sounded. As the height inside this contraption was only 2½ - 3 feet it does not take much imagination to understand that spending a half an hour or so cooped up in such a confined space is not ideal, especially as it was virtually impossible to sit up. So a decision was made that in the event of any future air raids we would use the public shelter. This was situated above ground just inside the hospital boundary at the end of our terrace and was used by most of our neighbours, so from the next alert it became my job to pick up my brother, in his carrycot, still tucked up and sleeping, and take him to the shelter.

The first V1 doodlebug (also known as a buzz-bomb) passed over the city on the night of 26<sup>th</sup> June 1944 and several times after that, while carrying my brother down the road to the shelter, we would hear the unmistakable phut-phut of a doodlebug engine and see the white flame belching from the ramjet as it passed overhead travelling very fast. It was quite an experience to see one of these flying over on a dark night knowing that you could stand and watch it as long as the engine did not cut out. However, should the engine noise stop, then it was a case of taking cover quickly as it did not take many seconds for the flying bomb to reach the ground. Now that we were back in the city and able to hear the sirens as soon as they commenced their familiar warble, it is interesting to note that everyone automatically got out of bed and dressed. In my case this is exactly what I would do, but for some reason I would do it in my sleep and I then woke up to hear the sirens winding down and find that I was fully dressed. This situation continued for me until later in the war, when night raids became a thing of the past and we returned to normal sleeping in our beds upstairs.

Bombers of the American 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force always carried out daylight attacks on targets in Germany which meant that they were usually getting airborne in the early morning allowing them to return to their bases before darkness closed in. From early morning we would hear the bombers (B24 Liberators) stationed at Horsham St Faiths (Norwich International Airport) warming their engines prior to taking off for another daylight bombing raid over Germany. The 24<sup>th</sup> April 1944 was no exception but for some reason none of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force took off until much later than normal which meant that they did not return to their bases until well after dark.

With all the American airfields in Norfolk there were a lot of problems for the returning aircraft. Because they were now flying at night the aircraft had their navigation lights on and all the airfields were lit up like Christmas trees to facilitate recovery. German aircraft were quick to take advantage of this situation and switched on their navigation lights and mingled with the returning American bombers. The German aircraft bided their time and waited until the bombers were at their most vulnerable on their approach to landing, before commencing their attack. Because we



were close to Horsham St Faiths we heard quite a lot of machine gun fire during this period but as the air raid sirens had not sounded we did not know what was going on. It was not until the next day that we found out that some of the bombers from St Faiths were caught up in this fiasco and had been shot down. In all the confusion, 14 B24 Liberators were shot down around the county before the navigation and airfield lights were extinguished and calm eventually returned.

I believe it was in the Spring of 1944 that we were woken one morning at about 6.30am by a loud explosion. No Air Raid alert had sounded, no aircraft engines were audible and having no idea what was happening we were undecided as to whether we should get up and go to the air raid shelter. After the explosion everything seemed quiet so we came to the conclusion that something had exploded on the airfield and therefore carried on with our usual early morning activities. Later that morning during our school assembly, the headmaster, who was also the commanding officer of a local squadron of the ATC based at the school, suddenly asked if we had heard an explosion earlier that morning. There was a murmur of assent from the assembled school and he then went on to explain that a secret device had landed on or near the Hellesdon golf course and exploded. How he knew anything about a secret device I have no idea, but it eventually came out in the papers that one of Hitler's secret weapons, a V2 rocket, had exploded near the city.

This V2 was one of the first to land in this country and a few months later one landed in marshy ground about 200 yards from my uncle's farm at Shotesham. Fortunately there was no serious damage or injuries as the ground conditions absorbed the shock of the explosion. The frightening thing about these new weapons was that their targets were indiscriminate and there was no warning of their approach so you were unable to take cover. My cousin had been outside when the V2 had exploded near their farm and after the explosion he then heard a rush of air. Presumably this was because the weapon was travelling faster than the speed of sound on impact. To the best of my knowledge, these two V2's were the only ones to land anywhere near the city and no damage was done in either case.

For several months we had seen aircraft flying around with black and white stripes painted on the wings and fuselage but had no idea why these markings had suddenly appeared. It was only after the invasion of Europe that their significance became apparent, which was so that allied aircraft could identify each other easily in the heat of battle. As there was no prior knowledge of when the invasion was to take place, we unaware that anything special was occurring during the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944. On this particular night we were finding it difficult to sleep properly as there was a continuous drone of aircraft engines which we put down to another 1000 bomber raid on Germany. It was not until later the next day when the news of the D Day landings came out that we realised the noise of the previous night must have been from part of the giant armada of aircraft which took part in the bombardment of the French coast prior to the invasion. Today it would have all been on television while it was taking place but our only information of what was happening was gleaned from newspapers and the BBC news bulletins. The only means we had of seeing film of the actual invasion was on the newsreels at the cinema a week or so after the event.

As I have mentioned before, every Friday I would meet my mother after school at Southgate's grocery store, situated on the corner of Golding Street (now Golding Square) and Dereham Road, to carry the week's groceries home on my bicycle, while she pushed my brother in his pram. On this particular day in November 1944 I was standing outside the shop looking after my brother, when I saw a Liberator bomber suddenly appear about 400 yards away flying extremely low. When it came into view I noticed that a large part of the right wing was missing, all four engines were on full power, but the aircraft was not flying normally. In fact it flew across the Dereham Road sideways (from left to right) and in an extremely high nose up attitude (in excess of 30 degrees) giving me a top plan view of the aircraft from where I was standing. From its attitude I knew that I was about to see my first plane crash and this proved to be correct. A few seconds after it came into view the nose of the aircraft climbed even higher until it finally stalled at around 400 feet. It then rolled onto its back and completed one turn of a spin before it hit the ground and exploded in a gigantic fireball.

It is difficult to explain how I felt at the bizarre sight of a large four-engine bomber turning onto its back and then heading vertically down towards the ground. All this happened over an extremely densely populated area and although all the crew were unfortunately killed, it was a miraculous escape for the people living under the flight path as the aircraft actually crashed on the only piece of open ground in that part of the city. The crash site was in the old City Corporation works yard in Barker Street, adjacent to the City Station marshalling yards, an open area of no more than 300-400 yards diameter, all of which was surrounded by rows of terrace houses. It was fortunate that the point

of impact happened where it did as there could have been many casualties from the closely packed houses surrounding the site. Everyone in the grocery shop thought that it was another air raid and the proprietor began to get his customers into his cellar. My mother came running out of the shop to get my brother and myself to go to the cellar but I was able to tell her what I had just witnessed and that it was not an air raid. Panic over, mother went back into the shop and explained the situation and calm returned once again.

It was not until the next day that we found out exactly what had happened. The aircraft, named Lady Jane, was apparently in trouble and was trying to return back to Horsham St Faiths, which in a straight line was only about a mile away. For some unknown reason it was flying at only 85 feet above the highly populated Earlham and Heigham Road area. My guess is that the pilot was hoping to make the nearest runway, but if this failed he would get to the fields, which at that time surrounded Sweet Briar Road less than a half a mile away, in order to carry out a crash landing. Unfortunately he clipped St Philips church tower (now St. Johns RC First School) in Heigham Road with his right wing tip losing about 14 feet and most of his right aileron in the process. This obviously made the aircraft unstable and although when it came into my view a couple of seconds later, the engines were revving hard, the nose was in such a high attitude plus it was actually flying sideways, that the pilot had no chance of making a recovery. A plaque commemorating the pilots' bravery in stopping the aeroplane from crashing on a residential area was placed on the end terrace house in Barker Street several years later. It was a nice gesture, but in reality the pilot had no input and it was pure luck that the aircraft crashed on the only piece of open ground in the vicinity.

As the working week consisted of five and a half days, all the shops and offices in the city would close at lunchtime on Thursday, and the factories and heavy industrial firms would close at lunchtime Saturday. Thursday was always referred to as early closing day, due to the fact that all the shops and offices were closed and the city centre was completely empty. Because of the large influx of farmers buying and selling cattle, Saturday was known as Market Day. Although I was only 14 I was now working in an office and Saturday was our busiest day it was inevitable that my half-day would be Thursday afternoon. Apart from being able to go to the cinema, there was nothing much to do on these half days and I must admit I did envy some of my old classmates who had taken jobs in the factories or garages, as they were at least able to do their shopping on their days off. The only way I could buy anything was to either forego my lunch hour, or rush home and quickly devour my meal, and endeavour to get to the shops without being late back to work. Even this was not as easy as it sounds as a large proportion of the shops also closed for an hour at lunchtime so it was a case of hoping that your lunch period did not coincide with theirs.

With the war drawing to a close and air raid warnings now very infrequent, we still had to conform to the blackout regulations and rationing was as strict as ever. However people were now beginning to relax knowing that the anxieties of the previous 5 years were fast receding into the history books and that normality might soon return. So it was with great elation that we eventually heard that the Germans had surrendered and that the war was finally over and the government of the day declared a public holiday to celebrate Victory in Europe (VE) day. Norwich celebrated with many street parties for the children and although rationing was still very much with us, this did not stop neighbours getting together and baking cakes and other goodies for them. Bunting and flags came out and adorned the streets as they used to before the war, tables and chairs were brought out and set up in the roadway (something that would be impossible today) and in the evening even fireworks appeared from somewhere. During the day the Walk and Market Place in the centre of Norwich was filled with crowds of people, including both English and American servicemen and women, all milling about laughing singing and thoroughly enjoying themselves.

I remember going into the city in the evening with friends and for the first time the blackout had disappeared and the entire city was aglow with light. Many of the churches were ringing peals on their bells for the first time in 5 years and all the Civic buildings were bathed in light but whether they had their original floodlights on, or whether they were using searchlights, I cannot recall. We walked to the Cathedral and there, the army had placed several searchlights at strategic points around the Cathedral Close, using their beams to light up the nave and spire. All around the city the searchlight batteries had switched on their equipment and were enjoying themselves sweeping large beams of light across the night sky. Not to be outdone, the RAF and USAAF from the local airfields also joined in the festivities by flying their aeroplanes over the city dropping coloured flares and shooting off coloured Very lights. The night eventually finished off with a grand firework display put on by the city council.

We heard on the radio that an Atom Bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima on the 16<sup>th</sup> August but did not really understand the implications of this at the time. With no television coverage as there is nowadays, we could not really comprehend how one bomb could obliterate a large city. It was not until much later when newsreel film of the event was shown that we began to understand what had taken place. By the time the war in the Pacific eventually came to an end I was having a week's holiday from work and was spending it with my aunt and uncle at Castle Rising. As I had an idea that the end of hostilities was imminent, I had purchased some fireworks before going so that we would be able to celebrate at the appropriate time. Because of my age (nearly 15) I was still in to exploding things and therefore purchased mainly penny bangers and jumping jacks, as these were easy to carry and could be thrown about. A jumping jack was made in such a way that after lighting, it would explode several times and each time it would shoot off in a different direction, hence the name.

When VJ Day arrived, I was staying with my aunt and uncle at Castle Rising and on VJ (Victory in Japan) night which, as far as I remember was celebrated on a Saturday, we all went in to Kings Lynn. After we had a fish and chip (original fast food) tea, we then spent the evening mingling with the crowds around the town waiting for the civic fireworks display. After this had finished we caught the last bus, which unfortunately only went as far as South Wootton, leaving us with a two and a half mile walk home. Still, after all the excitement, this was a small price to pay but at least we knew that the war was now well and truly over and our lives would change forever.

Bearing in mind that all the foregoing relates exclusively to me and my family during the war years, it should be remembered that many other families had much the same experience throughout this period. Although the following statistics are available in many official documents, I think it is worth recording them here as well, thereby giving the reader an overall picture of just what the citizens of Norwich had to contend with during the 5 years of war. Before the war began in 1939 there were around 102,000 people living in 35,569 houses within the city boundary. By the time the war finished, bombing had totally destroyed 2,082 houses, a further 2,651 were seriously damaged and 25,621 were moderately damaged. It can be seen from these figures that the war had touched almost every family in the city in some way or another.



Corner of Barn Rd & Dereham Rd – Regal Cinema



Corner of St Benedicts Street



Typical Barrage Balloon & Winch